

Why do we need a new journal about writing for wellbeing?

Simon Poole, Kiz Bangerh, Jennifer Bertrand, Kim Etherington, Deborah Lee, Reinekke Lengelle, Deborah Southwell, Kate Thompson, Claire Williamson, Esther Wafula, and Jeannie Wright

Jeannie Wright: Because the American-based *Journal of Poetry Therapy (JPT)*, wonderful though it is, might not reach the audience I'm after. Neither do the counselling and psychotherapy research journals. The focus isn't quite right because writing creatively is my passion, whereas for most (talking) therapists it's an adjunct or "technique". For the last few years, articles I've written about writing for therapeutic purposes and writing for wellbeing have had nowhere to go - and *LIRIC*, as an international journal with its roots in the traditions of Lapidus, fills that gap!

Claire Williamson: Having been actively involved in academia relating to writing for wellbeing for twenty years, and being the Director of Studies for the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP) at Metanoia Institute, I welcome any addition to the conversation about CWTP, and I too have always found the *JPT* a useful resource because it has been the only dedicated therapeutic writing journal available.

In the UK (and the wider Lapidus International Community) we have a strong contingent of well-trained, experienced practitioners and researchers with perspectives to offer. Some of these perspectives have been showcased at International Creative Bridges (a bi-annual conference between Metanoia Institute and Lapidus). And it has been this wide range of perspectives that have characterised the writing for wellbeing movement in the UK, since discussion groups developed in different geographical pockets in the early nineties, some of which took place in London at the instigation of the Poetry Society. It would be a very interesting exercise to gather the accounts of the individuals involved in these various meetings,

but from what I know, the people having these conversations were either practitioners already employing therapeutic writing in the community, or they were from the survivors' movement, particularly Survivors' Poetry. I wasn't personally at these meetings, but my understanding is that a strong message from Survivors' Poetry was that they didn't want writing to be taken away from them, re-packaged and delivered back to them as therapy. Lapidus (which grew out of this groundswell of discussion) has always taken this understanding forward in terms of the potential power dynamic, being welcoming to and aware of a membership that encompasses those who want to write, those who facilitate writing, and those whose curiosity sends them into research.

To this effect, Lapidus has slightly different beginnings than the National Association of Poetry Therapy in the US, where the concept of poetry therapy grew out of clinical perspectives (Mazza, 2005/2017) and the bibliotherapy movement (Hynes and Hynes-Berry, 2011). A comprehensive early history, crediting its many contributors can be found on the NAPT website.

Although both the US and UK movements have been open to a wide range of viewpoints from the outset, each have found a different pattern of growth in roots and shoots. For me, *LIRIC* is not a 'Brexit' or movement towards separation from our Atlantic counterpart, the *JPT* - it is the opposite: a vote of confidence in our international community for dialogue (cross-pollination, to extend the metaphor) with other relevant journals; the dialogic is so much part of CWTP, this feels important.

Kiz Bangerh: When I read the question: 'Why do we need a new journal about writing for wellbeing?', my first response is: 'Why not?'. I was one of the first cohorts of students to graduate from Metanoia's MSc CWTP. It was so hard to find an appropriate journal to publish my work in Therapeutic Hip Hop (a term I coined during my thesis) that I gave up. I wonder how many more people have felt the same. We, the Lapidus International community, offer a much-needed ray of light into the hearts and minds of many. I hope our new scholarly journal offers a beacon

of light to lead researchers, established and fledgling, in their journeys of discovery in our precious, collective field.

Kim Etherington: This new *LIRIC* journal feels to me like a ‘coming of age’ statement for the Lapidus International community. Jeannie says the articles she has written about writing for therapeutic purposes and words for wellbeing have had nowhere to go in the UK. Now we have a ‘home’ to call our own - one that feels ‘just right’, as Goldilocks said! Now we have a publishing home for the growing body of members who have undertaken research for Masters and Doctoral degrees, among others, which can contribute to the body of knowledge related to our field; for the many innovative practitioners who don’t necessarily see themselves as researchers, even though they have introduced new and innovative practices in a variety of different settings that, when shared through publications and conference presentations, can enhance and extend the practice of others in the field; and for practitioners who have undertaken studies of their *own* practice that have clear implications for themselves *and* for others. When those practitioner-researchers approach that work reflexively, we also learn about practitioner research itself: how they conducted that research and what they found out about this kind of research while doing it, and reflecting on that process. *LIRIC* is also a home for academics undertaking qualitative or quantitative research related to our field, whose papers are clearly focussed on practice. There are also practitioners who partner academics in their research, thereby utilising the knowledge and skills of both perspectives. As there is a limited literature in the field of writing for wellbeing at the moment we can gain a great deal from exploring the literature related to therapeutic disciplines such as counselling and psychotherapy (Bondi and Fewell 2016; McLeod 1999) to

discover the knowledge we can transfer about practitioner-research for those engaged in writing for wellbeing.

Writing and publishing practical and theoretical ideas is a useful way to consolidate practice and integrate learning, bring clarity, insight and confidence, and provides a focussed way of sharing sometimes complex processes with others in the field.

Publishing in a peer reviewed journal, as well as enhancing a practitioner's credibility, demonstrates that individual's interest and expertise, which can attract the attention of those searching for new learning, workshops, groups or training, thereby enabling the practitioner to grow their practice and advance their career development. As *LIRIC* is an Open Access journal that is freely available online to anyone interested in reading it, the potential readership will extend beyond Lapidus International membership, so who knows where someone's paper will end up...?

Kate Thompson: I have worked in the field of Counselling and Expressive Writing (the inclusive term I use to cover writing for wellbeing, writing as therapy, therapeutic writing, creative writing for therapeutic purposes (and by the way, I consider writing to be always both a therapeutic and creative act) for about 25 years, living in the UK and the US. Initially I introduced writing into my counselling work as a matter of conviction but without any professional backup. So I have felt the want of journal like this for almost all my career – a place where people can **write** about their work with authority, publish their research in a peer-reviewed journal and **read** what others are doing and discovering. That is my personal interest. As a member of the Expressive Therapies community in the US, I have seen Writing treated as the youngest sibling by Music, Art, Dance/Movement and Wilderness Therapies. Often Writing is considered an adjunct rather than a full member of the family. *LIRIC*, this new peer-reviewed journal, is, as Kim says, a 'coming of age' statement for the Expressive

Writing field, a home for all the exciting new work being done in academic graduate courses (I want to see my students and supervisees publish and share their research and practice) and by practitioners in a multitude of different settings in many different countries. The creation of a journal like this also shows how far we've come since the days when the 'Pennebaker Paradigm' was the only evidence anyone quoted to demonstrate the efficacy of Writing as a Way of Healing. It will bring credibility and a wider audience to the work that we have been doing in our own ways for so long.

Simon Poole: I used to smoke, when, as a younger musician, I lived in the countryside. It is due to this seemingly insignificant fact that I first came across the phenomenon that has yielded great metaphoricity in my work as a lyricist (concerned with *techne*), as an educator (concerned with *praxis*), and as a researcher (concerned with *theoría*).

I was outside once, smoking on the doorstep of a small house in Kelsall, at night time. When I noticed how, on the opposite side of the lane, the silver-birch twigs and sticks shone in concentric circles, around the neon streetlight. As I marvelled at this moment's beauty my cigarette went out. I pulled the zippo from my pocket, and as I tilted my head to relight my cigarette, I again noticed illuminated concentric circles: this time though, their illumination was not bourn of silvered bark, it was instead, bourn of tiny scratches surrounding the reflection of the streetlight in the zippo's shiny, steel surface.

I learnt so much that night, but it was some years later, when I read Chapter 23 of Eliot's 'Middlemarch' (Eliot, 1994), and recalled the smoky, birched night, that I realised the significance of this phenomenon. In the first few pages, Eliot describes such light as our subjective consciousness; that it is a particular position or context that allows us to shed light upon, or reflect on, particular moments, that have grown

because of, or been inculcated into us, by life. We can each recognise the particular twigs or scratches shining in concentric patterns by virtue of our own light.

There are, however, other twigs just as silvered, and countless scratches on the metal's surface all growing, or etched, in different directions, and they are just as strong or deep as those that are visible to us. Our particular experiences, contexts or positions do not light them up though. They may, nonetheless, be illuminated by another's particular experience, position, or context. If two sources of light simultaneously shone, we would begin to see the differing concentric circles, of another's perception of experience, yet more specifically how they relate to our own. Writing from one's own position affords this insight: for me, *LIRIC*, our journal, serves as such a polished surface, or sylvan entanglement. It is a space, where interest in the craft of lyricism, poetry or writing; the practice of being a therapist, or educator; and, the theorising of an academic or researcher, can all be reflected upon. From the shining of one's own light, near others who shine as brightly from their own context or positions, we can begin to share and possibly understand the experiences of others, for the benefit of all. It seems to me that the value of this journal, and the gap that has been, until now, largely unfilled is the potential for the Lapidus International community and others to shine, reflect and learn, in such a mutually beneficial way. Whether we be poets concerned with notions of wellbeing; writers, hip-hop artists, or songwriters working with the therapeutic aspects of writing in communities; therapists who recognise the worth of writing, and significance of reflection in their practice; or any researcher interested in any of the above, this journal creates a space, where brave constellations of lights can shine, illuminate, dim, realign and shine anew with infinite potential.

Esther Wafula: In many cultures, including my own, names are important pointers to the meaning or purpose of a thing, a place or a person. Four words in the name of this new journal signify, for me, the important role it will play in the field of writing for wellbeing. These are International, Research, Innovation and Community. As a Kenyan scholar interested in the therapeutic value of writing for wellbeing, I am delighted that this journal actively welcomes contributions from around the world. The journal's open access policy will undoubtedly facilitate an international readership as well. For the growing field of writing for wellbeing, the journal strikes the right note with its emphasis on research and innovation and by creating much needed space for scholars, researchers and practitioners in this field to share their findings and innovations. Last but not least, I appreciate the community spirit that this journal aims to foster among scholars, researchers, and practitioners who work with writing for wellbeing. Moreover, as Claire has said, the cross-pollination and dialogue that the *LIRIC* journal will engender with other relevant journals in the international community is also important and, I would add, necessary.

Deborah Southwell: CWTP is a wider field than poetry therapy alone, and a more specific field than creative writing alone. *LIRIC* aims to cover this breadth as well as the depth of CWTP. All forms of creative writing for the benefit of the individual and community are welcome, whether prose, fiction, journaling, poetry, or other forms of creative writing. All writing from the therapy to the therapeutic ends, from the mental health to the wellness ends of the spectrum are welcome. This first volume is the beginning of another conversation, one focused on what we know and what we learn from our research and our practice to progress our own growth and to develop further what we offer for the benefit of others.

Jennifer Bertrand: Creative writing was my refuge throughout the most challenging periods in my life. When I began my graduate degree at Athabasca University and learned about the field of writing for wellbeing, I discovered how my writing had contributed to my own healing journey and transformations of self. My autoethnographic research on creative writing for adult survivors of childhood abuse is in process of being published and the sharing of my private writing with a broader audience brought closure to what had once been a profound hurt. The *LIRIC Journal* offers a dedicated space for this kind of research, learning, and transformation. I am honoured to serve on the board and to support the publication of the inaugural issue.

Reinekke Lengelle: I live and work in Edmonton, Canada and in 1996, I started teaching an adult non-credit course called “Writing for the Heart” for the University of Alberta’s extension department. Since childhood, writing has been my go-to process and I knew it “worked” to bring clarity to any life struggle, most recently to spousal loss and bereavement (Lengelle, 2021). In 2002, I was asked by Athabasca University, Canada’s Open University, to develop a graduate course in this area, that I called “Writing the Self: The Experience and Potential of Writing for the Purpose of Personal Development”; it has been running now for 17 years. In order to develop it, I needed academic resources to support what I was already doing and saying in the classroom. I began looking for more theoretical and research-based material and in some back corner of a fluorescently lit library aisle with colossally tall shelves and no other soul to be seen, I came across the book “Self on the Page” by Celia Hunt and Fiona Sampson (1998). I remember holding that book and thinking, “this is really important”. On the back cover of this Jessica Kingsley volume, Lapidus was mentioned and within a year I was on a plane to the UK to meet my professional family. They welcomed me with kindness and surprise, “you came all the way from

Canada for our conference?!" Yes, that's right. The mother of a 5-year-old with only part-time work (our little family was living happily on a very tight budget); I remember wearing the same red fleece jacket to two Lapidus conferences. That first trip, I was bold enough to ask, Pam Thorne, a complete stranger who worked as administrator for Lapidus, to pick me up from Heathrow and host me. This was not just audacity; I had a genuine need; it was one of those moments in life where one goes forward because one is driven, and others met me with profound generosity in fulfilling the wish. This was a community where I didn't have to explain what I did in *adjusted* terms. At that first conference I met some of the founders of Lapidus, the "core people" in the field, with whom I am still joyfully connected almost 20 years later. The *LIRIC* journal fills a gap in our field because it offers a place to explore and articulate theory, research, and practice. *LIRIC* isn't limited to poetry; it makes room for all the writing forms and projects and it asks for academic rigour and not just feel-good stories. I have students in Canada and The Netherlands who are strongly drawn to the field and they too call Lapidus home; *LIRIC* will offer them professional growth opportunities, resources for their (future) work, and a community to call home.

Deborah Lee: The Editorial comes to me last as I'm the new Editor, taking on the role from Simon Poole, who has already written. I've taught sociology at UK universities for over 20 years, and in 2018 I qualified as a person-centred psychotherapist. Taking in psychotherapy - as art/magic in the therapy room and (intertwined) as an intellectual discipline - gave me a new lease of life as an academic: I wanted to connect psychotherapy with sociology; but it wasn't just that – I had/have a desire to write (sociologically-informed) psychotherapy in more unusual ways than most people do, to explore beyond the usual boundaries; and while, in time, I found some places to publish that sort of work, there wasn't a natural 'home'

for it, there was nowhere that quite encouraged or enabled the expansive risk-taking that I want *LIRIC* to be offering. Home-coming is a theme woven into this Editorial; we hope you'll feel our welcome, and hear me saying that we will seek to be constructive as well as rigorous. I'm very pleased that *LIRIC* is to be online and open access: we'll be able to share people's work widely, see it appreciated, witness its influence. And I'm delighted that *LIRIC* will be encouraging (among many others) emerging voices. At *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, I am Editor of Notes from the Front Line (similar to *LIRIC*'s Innovations/Passions): I know the power/potential of new writers seeing their work, their very selves, in print for the first time (a thrill that never fades). For me personally, writing embodies wellbeing – even when we're writing in 'sensitive' areas (some of my writing is about #MeToo, such as: Lee and Palmer (eds) 2020), where wellbeing is something to interrogate rather than assume (as Kim Etherington mentions in her article in this Issue). Writing can enable us - psychotherapists, counsellors, CWTP practitioners, creative writers, everyone - to find ourselves over and over again, to make connections with others, and to individually/collectively challenge what we feel needs to be changed in the world, as well as share sheer joy, the perfect pleasure of words (as Laura Grace Simpkins does in this Issue). What could be better than a journal that offers all that (and more)? We'll be revealing developments at *LIRIC* over the next few months (keep an eye on the website and Lapidus International social media channels). The call for contributions for Issue 2 (December 2021) will open on 31st January 2021, so please do start considering what you might offer.

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